



Frequently Asked Questions

* Where should I count birds?

You can count birds anywhere: in your backyard, at a local park or national wildlife refuge, or wherever you like to watch birds. In 2013 the GBBC goes global, so you can enter your birds from anywhere in the world!

* How long should I count birds?

Spend at least 15 minutes at a location. If you can spend more than 15 minutes, you'll get a better sense of which birds are in your area. If you'd like to do more than one count at the same location, or counts at several locations, you can do that too.

* Why do I have to register for the GBBC now?

Beginning in 2013, the GBBC will be integrated with eBird--a worldwide bird data collection program which allows users to keep personal bird records and lists. The change means you have to create a free account in order to enter your 2013 bird checklists for the GBBC. You'll only have to do this once to participate in all future GBBC events.

If you are already an eBird user, simply go birding during the GBBC period and submit your checklists through eBird—your data will appear on all GBBC output.

* Why is the GBBC integrating with eBird?

There are many benefits to integrating with eBird:

- **Personal record-keeping:** The integration gives you access to all your bird records and bird lists submitted through eBird or GBBC. You'll find them all in one place under the "My GBBC" tab on the GBBC website or the "My eBird" tab in eBird.
- **No double entry:** In past years, eBird users had to enter their data in both eBird and GBBC in order to have it available for both projects. Now the information can be entered just once

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- **Global access:** GBBC reports can be submitted from any location in the world, and in four different languages.
- **Precise locations:** With more accurate location data, your GBBC observations will be more useful to scientists and conservationists and easier for you to track over time.
- **Year-round access:** Although the GBBC is a 4-day project, you can use eBird to track your bird sightings year-round.
- **Better visualization:** Interactive maps will allow you to explore bird observations in much greater detail than ever before.
- **Corrections:** If you realize you've entered erroneous information, you can go back into your reports anytime to make corrections.

*** What happens to the GBBC reports I've filed in the past?**

GBBC checklists filed from 1998 through 2012 are still available. For now, you can access your historic accounts by clicking on the "GBBC Historic Data" button in the left navigation bar on the GBBC website. You will also be able to access maps created from historic data. In coming years, historic data will be moved into your GBBC/eBird account.

*** Why do I have to use a map when I enter data from now on?**

Our ability to understand bird populations depends on knowing exactly where you are making your observations. Starting in 2013, we are making improvements to the GBBC mapping process to collect more refined locations. We ask that you use the new Google Maps interface to zoom in and plot where you observed birds as accurately as possible. This will allow us to make better use of every observation you submit.

*** What do I do if I am watching birds on a hike?**

Although many people participate in the Great Backyard Bird Count from small areas like their backyards, we also welcome data from bird walks, hikes, or special outings with your local bird club or nature center. Beginning in 2013, you'll be asked what kind of count you did when you enter your checklist:

Traveling: You traveled a specific distance—walking a trail, driving a refuge loop, field birding

Stationary: You stayed at a fixed location, i.e., watching your feeders from a window

Incidental: You noted a bird while doing something else—birding was not your primary activity

You'll also enter your start time, how much time you spent counting birds, and how many people contributed to the checklist. Use the incidental observation option when birding was not your primary purpose, or when you have bird records but no effort information. Examples include a fly-over Osprey seen while driving to work or inputting historical data with no effort information.

*** How do I enter the checklist if I am counting with a group of people?**

When you enter your GBBC data, you'll be asked to indicate how many people contributed to the checklist. Only one person needs to enter the data. You can then share this list with the other people in your group by clicking "share this list" in the right-hand column of the bird checklist page. The other people in your group can edit their version of the checklist after they accept it. The shared birds on your lists will **not** be counted more than once for that location.

*** Can I enter more than one checklist per day?**

Yes. You submit a new checklist for each new location, even if it's on the same day. You may do a count in your own yard, for example, then move on to a city park, then to a wildlife refuge. That's three different checklists for the same day. You may also enter more than one checklist per day from the same location. For example, if you spend an hour watching birds in the morning, and another hour in the evening, it is more valuable to submit those as two different checklists than to combine them into one list.

*** What does the "Are you reporting all species" question mean?**

This is one of the most important questions. If you are reporting a full list of the species you were able to identify by sight or sound then please select "Yes." However, if you are **intentionally excluding** certain species like House Sparrows or American Crows, please be sure to select "No." The question is not an attempt to determine if you were able to identify every bird you saw but rather whether your list is just reporting one or a few highlights.

*** What if I can't identify some of the birds I see?**

Do your best to figure it out. See if you can find the bird you're looking for in a field guide. The [All About Birds Online Bird Guide](#) provides photos, sounds, maps, and information about birds in North America. For help in distinguishing similar-looking species for North America, visit the GBBC page on [tricky IDs](#). If you're still unable to work out a species ID, that's OK. The checklist may have options such as Downy/Hairy Woodpecker or Greater/Lesser Yellowlegs that will be useful for known identification challenges. Regardless of whether you are able to identify all species you see or not, please be sure to understand the question "Are you reporting all species?" (see "What does the "Are you reporting all species" question mean?" above).

*** If I am an eBird participant, do I need to enter my GBBC data separately?**

No. Now that the GBBC is being integrated with eBird you only need to enter your information once, either on the eBird website or through the GBBC website. In either case, it will become part of the data collected for the GBBC. If you are already familiar with eBird, we recommend that you simply continue using eBird as you otherwise would, but please make sure to go birding during the GBBC period and submit your data! Please be aware that in this pilot year, data from eBird goes to the GBBC, and data from the GBBC will be displayed through the GBBC site *but not on the eBird site*. To have your data in both projects, you must submit via eBird. Data from both projects also become part of the [Avian Knowledge Network](#) database and are accessible to scientists for analyses of bird populations.

*** What if I make a mistake when entering my checklist?**

You will always have access to your GBBC reports and can go back to correct any mistakes or omissions. To make a change, click on the "My GBBC" button on the GBBC website (or "My eBird" on the eBird website). Click on "Manage My Observations" in the right-hand column. Here you can scroll to your list and make changes.

*** What do I do if I see a bird that is not on my area's checklist?**

If you see a bird that is not on the checklist for your area, first click the "show rare species" option in the right column. If your bird is not there, click the "Add Species" button to add it to your list. Species added to a checklist that do not appear on the main list or the rarities list for your area will require confirmation by a reviewer before they are included in the database.

*** How do I estimate the number of birds when there's a roost or a huge flock?**

First count the birds in a small part of the flock. Then estimate how many blocks of equal size would make up the entire flock. Multiply number of blocks by the number of individual birds you first counted to come up with an estimate. For a more detailed explanation of this technique, [click here](#).

*** Can I count birds I only detect by sound?**

Yes, if you are confident in your ability to identify the species by sound. But it gets trickier if many birds of one or more species are singing or calling. Add these birds to your tally only if you are very sure of what you have heard.

*** Can I include birds that fly overhead in my tally?**

Yes, but only if they are close enough for you to make a positive identification. It might be easy enough for a single bird at close range. But if a flock of gulls flies overhead, it may be pretty tough to distinguish which species they are—especially if it's a mixed flock. So only mark down a flying bird if you have a certain ID.

*** Why are some reports not displayed?**

Out-of-range species or large flocks of some species are flagged for review by a local reviewer before the sighting is added to the database. If the reviewer has any questions about your sighting, he or she will contact you. This is how we try to ensure the highest possible accuracy in the database. Flagged records, even if they ultimately cannot be confirmed, will always be visible in your personal GBBC (or eBird) account.

*** How do I indicate the time spent if I watched intermittently through the day?**

Instead of watching in defined blocks of time, many people prefer to keep track of birds on and off throughout the day. If you do this, simply estimate the time you actually spent watching birds. For example, you may have been watching intermittently from 8:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M., but estimate that time actually spent watching birds was about two hours. It doesn't have to be exact—this gives us a general idea of the amount of effort expended.

*** If I see a bird that's within my line of sight but not in my own yard, can I include it in my tally?**

Yes. As long as you are sure of the identification, any bird you see while you're participating can be included in your checklist.

*** How can people without computers participate?**

All GBBC data need to be entered online. If you know someone without a computer who wants to participate, you can use your own GBBC account to create a separate username for their checklists. If the person does not have an email address, please provide your own so that we can contact someone to verify any unusual records that need follow-up. Be sure to enter your friend's first and last names so he or she gets credit for the sightings!

*** How is the information from the GBBC used?**

Bird populations are constantly changing. No single scientist or team of scientists could hope to keep track of the complicated patterns of movement of species around the world. The information from GBBC participants, combined with other surveys, helps scientists learn how birds are affected by environmental changes.

The information you send in can provide the first sign that individual species may be increasing or declining from year to year. Data gathered over many years help highlight how a species' range may be expanding or shrinking. A big change, noted consistently over a period of years, is an indication that something is happening in the environment that is affecting the birds and that should be followed

up on. GBBC information also allows us to look at what kinds of birds inhabit different areas, such as cities versus suburbs.

All the information from the GBBC will be accessible through the website and also becomes part of a massive bird observation database called the [Avian Knowledge Network](#). AKN now holds more than 106 million bird observations from 51 partner organizations which are used by scientists around the world.

*** Why is the count in February?**

The GBBC gives us a snapshot of how birds are surviving the winter and where they are located just before spring migrations begin in March. Scientists at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the National Audubon Society, Bird Studies Canada, and elsewhere can combine this information with data from surveys conducted at different times of the year.

*** Can you make it longer—maybe a week?**

The reason we get such great information from the GBBC is that so many people participate. Because the GBBC is a short 4-day project, most people feel comfortable making a commitment to take part on one or more of those days. If you'd like to do more, keep using your new eBird account to report sightings anywhere, anytime or check out other citizen-science projects offered through the [National Audubon Society](#) the [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) and [Bird Studies Canada](#).

*** How can National Wildlife Refuges and Urban Bird Treaty City Partners get more people involved in my area?**

If you're interested in helping spread the word about the GBBC, you can become one of our special [GBBC ambassadors](#). Your contribution may be as simple as printing and distributing the GBBC poster in your area. (You will be able to download the flyer from the GBBC website when it is available for the next count.) Or you can do more, by printing the news release from the website and sending it to your local paper, bird club, library, birding store, and other locations. Media ambassadors consent to be interviewed for local stories about the project. Some people give presentations on how to do the GBBC with the help of the PowerPoint slide program we provide on this website. Each year, ambassadors coordinate GBBC events at nature centers, senior centers, and other locations.

*** How do you select winners in the photo contest?**

It isn't easy—each year GBBC participants submit thousands of images! We post a selection of images in the GBBC photo gallery. After the event, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Audubon, and Bird Studies Canada begin the months-long process of sorting through each and every photo, rating them based on artistic merit and technical skill—such as focus, lighting, composition, color, and degree of effort required to obtain the shot. Judges from the three organizations make their final selections in six categories, including best overall, best composition, most interesting behavior, best group shot, and

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best habitat shot. The results are announced before the next GBBC, and prizes awarded. [See photo contest rules.](#)

*** Can you recommend a good field guide?**

Many excellent field guides are available in book stores. Some people find it easier to identify birds using photographs. Others prefer an artist's drawing. Be sure whatever guide you choose includes a range map for each species so you know whether or not you're likely to see a bird in your area. You can choose a guide to all the birds of North America or one that is limited to your geographic region or even your state. The free online bird guide on the [All About Birds](#) web site has descriptions of hundreds of species, with photos and sound recordings that will also help you identify birds. There are many field guides available for birds native to other regions around the world.

*** Will I be notified about the next GBBC if I participated before?**

If you entered an email address when you participated in the past, and it has not changed, then you will get a couple of reminders about the upcoming GBBC along with eNewsletters that are distributed from October through March.